DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 339 789 UD 028 459

TITLE	A View from the Inside: Multicultural Education. Report of the Select Seminar on Excellence in Education.
INSTITUTION	Capital Area School Development Association, Albany, NY.
PUB DATE	Nov 91
NOTE	29p.; Photographs will not copy well.
AVAILABLE FROM	The Capital Area School Development Association, Husted 211, University at Albany, State University of New York, 135 Western Avenue, Albany, NY 12222 ($10.00).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Role; Boards of Education; College Faculty; *Cultural Awareness; Curriculum Development; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Ethnic Groups; *Excellence in Education; Intercultural Programs; *Minority Groups; *Multicultural Education; Parent Participation; School Personnel; Seminars; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

The Select Seminar on Excellence in Education met for 5 days between December 1990 and March 1991 to discuss multicultural education in schools. Participants were 27 master teachers, administrators, university professors, and community leaders. This monograph summarizes discussions at these meetings, emphasizing the kinds of attitudes, content, instructional resources, and strategies that are necessary for the effective development and delivery of a multicultural curriculum. Such a curriculum is one in which specific attention is given to knowledge and perspective drawn from the major cultural groups in our society. It implies an educational experience that prepares students to live in a global society. Attention is given to insuring that the knowledge and voices of many ethnic groups are included in the regular school experiences of all students. Suggestions are made as to types of classrooms that promote multicultural education, and how teachers, administrators, board of education members, parents, support staff, and community members can help promote multicultural education. Open letters to teachers and parents remind them of the parts they can play in multicultural education. In the final analysis, multicultural education is simply good education. (SLD)

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A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Report of the Select Seminar on Excellence in Education

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A VIEW
FROM THE
INSIDE:

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Report of the Select Seminar on Excellence in Education

November 1991

Sponsored by:
The Capital Area School Development Association
School of Education, The University at Albany
State University of New York

Funding for this Seminar was provided by:
- **The Golub Corporation**
- **Capital Newspapers**
- **Charles Freihofer Baking Company**
- **Stewart's**
- **The University at Albany Foundation**

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FOREWORD

In recent years we have seen acceleration in the expression of concerns relative to the place and role of teaching and learning about the variety of cultural strains that have been woven into or left to dangle on the borders of the fabric we call American culture. In 1991, we now see an emerging national debate in which those who have argued for a curriculum which is more inclusive of these several strains are being openly challenged by those who feel that the integrity of the canon is being threatened or that their world view is being distorted. In the monograph which follows, we find presented the case for inclusion and some direction for how it can be achieved.

We are reminded that the Americas, especially the United States, are home for representatives of almost all of the world's peoples, yet curriculum traditionally used in our schools is attentive to the knowledge and skills domains of a numeric minority of the world's peoples. Implicitly, we are told that this is too narrow a focus to support the knowledge development and knowledge transfer needs of the society, and too truncated to satisfy the society's changing conception of what it means to be an intelligently educated person. The monograph places its emphasis on the kinds of attitudes, content, instructional resources and strategies that are necessary to the effective development and delivery of a multicultural curriculum. Such a curriculum is viewed as one in which specific attention is given to knowledge and perspective drawn from the major cultural groups in our society. It is an approach to education which values diversity, celebrates differences, and honors social justice. It implies an educational experience which prepares learners to live in a global society in which we recognize many "right" ways and the possibility of conflicting truths. It forces an examination of what is common to us as human beings, "a universal view — and those qualities and characteristics that make us unique — a view of the individual as a reflection of culture."

Attention is given to the importance of insuring that the knowledge and voices of African-American, Asian-American, Chicano-American, Latin-American, Native-American, and Puerto Rican-American are included in the regular school experiences of all students. Implications are presented for what classrooms should be like; for what teachers must do and be; for administrative responsibility and practice; for parental attitudes and behaviors; and for policy determination. What is given insufficient attention in this monograph is the problem of the relationship of the teaching, learning and understanding of multiple cultures and perspectives to the primary purpose of education, which is not simply to transfer knowledge and skills, but to develop the intellect of the learner and her/his capacity to apply intellect to the solving of human problems. We see the learning and understanding of multiple cultures and perspectives as essential to that purpose. In the development of additional resource material for multicultural education, we will want to add to the excellent treatment seen in this brief monograph, more systematic attention to the role of multicultural education in enhancing the intellectual competence and humane capacities of students.

Edmund W. Gordon
The John M. Musser Professor of Psychology, Emeritus
Yale University New Haven, Connecticut

PREFACE

Twenty-seven people — master teachers, administrators, university professors, and community leaders — met in a series of five full-day sessions to have conversation about multiculturalism in the schools and to write a report on the results of their deliberations including observations and recommendations related to themes and topics selected for discussion. This Select Seminar on Excellence in Education held its meetings from December 1990 through March 1991. It is our observation that practicing educators must be heard and their observations heeded if changes in schools are to be more than cosmetic.

This seminar, which was funded by the Golub Corporation, Capital Newspapers, Charles Freihofer Baking Company, Stewart's, and the University at Albany Foundation, provided an occasion for a significant group of teachers, administrators, university professors and community leaders to participate actively in discussions about multiculturalism in the schools. We believe its significance will rest on the lucid and well-reasoned discussion embodied in its content.

The support of the Golub Corporation, Capital Newspapers, Charles Freihofer Baking Company, Stewart's, and the University at Albany Foundation is a testimony not only to their generosity but to their recognition of our mutual interdependence.

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THE PROCESS

The CASDA select seminars follow a very simple structure based upon a set of guiding principles:

1. Participants need to commit adequate time — to work, to reflect, and to write. Most seminars have been conducted for five full days spread about a month apart over the first three months with the final session being a two-day overnight retreat in the middle to the end of the fourth month.

2. A conducive working environment is very important. The seminars have been conducted in "protected environments" — away from the work site, in quiet and aesthetically pleasing surroundings with special care being given to the quality of food and refreshments. We believe this clearly is a first step in communicating to participants that the seminar is special and there are high expectations that the deliberations of its members will have an important result.

3. The seminar participants are the experts. We believe these select seminars have been highly successful in part because of the high degree of personal and professional respect afforded participants and the central belief on which the seminar series was founded: "that consciously competent teachers and administrators are the best arbiters of educational practice." While participants do extensive reading during the seminars, visiting experts and lecturers are not usually a part of this experience. The twenty-seven teachers, administrators, university professors, and community leaders who participated in this seminar constituted the body of experts.

4. Roles are "checked at the door." One's ideas must stand on their own, debated, accepted, or discarded without reference to one's position, prior experience, or education.

5. Seminars are self-governing entities with organizers serving the group. The coordination of the seminar was managed by personnel from CASDA. After providing the initial structure and on-going logistical support, they worked to transfer the governance and direction from themselves to the participants. By the end of the seminar, it is fair to say that it was self-governed with the coordinators taking direction from the seminar group.

6. The experience is at least as important as the product. All seminar participants agree that the process, the experience, is most important; in fact, the report might be quite different if the process had continued over time, this representing but one point in an ongoing process when, although there was much agreement on important issues, there was some disagreement as well. Even so, the report provides an important documentation of the experience and serves to validate for each of the participants the energy and effort they expended.

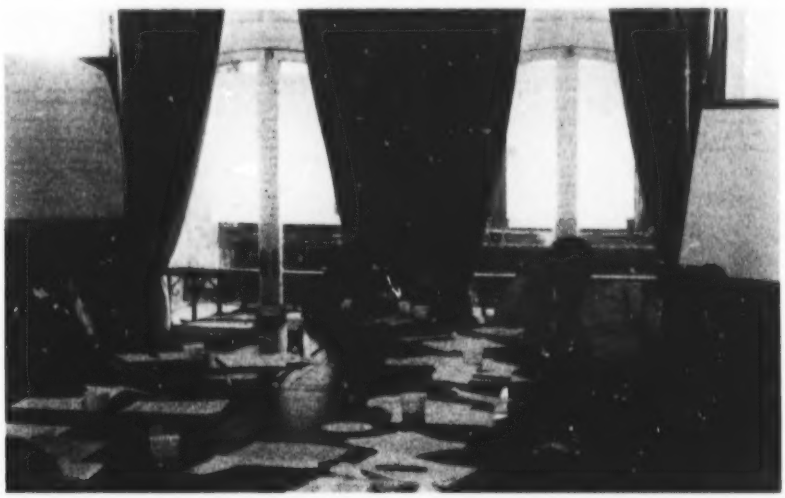
It is also hoped that this report will provide inspiration and help to those who read it and may assist in a modest way to continue what has become a very important national conversation on teaching and schools. We firmly believe such an ongoing conversation can only result in better education for all of our children.

INTRODUCTION

"... to arrive at a better understanding between people."

In 1924, The Rensselaerville Institute in Rensselaerville, New York, hosted the first in a series of summer "Country Forums on Human Relations." Francis and Laura Huyck, owners of the Institute property, felt after World War I that "... there should be some way of arriving at a better world understanding between peoples." They selected speakers to discuss education, economics, labor relations and history with the college students they had invited from many countries. Members of the public attended the evening meetings and the following morning students met with the speakers for round table discussions. Afternoons were set aside for recreation, but more talk occurred with late afternoon tea time. One of the students wrote that she felt the experience "... enriched my life by giving me a much better understanding of people, of countries; that, in the late 1920's, seemed very far away."

On March 18 and 19, 67 years later, the Institute was the setting for the culminating days of the Select Seminar on Multicultural Education, a corporation sponsored CASDA Select Seminar with essentially the same goal as the 1924 Country Forum, "... to arrive at a better understanding between people ..." A diverse group of twenty-seven master teachers, administrators, university professors, and community leaders from schools and universities in upstate New York met for single days in December, January and February at the Rockefeller Institute, and in the Rensselaerville retreat setting for two days in March to engage in a conversation about multiculturalism in the schools.



The framework provided gave us the opportinty to look reflectively at our own perspectives and to share other points of view. We, like the student groups of the 1924 Country Forum, sometimes felt the varying perspectives of our colleagues seemed "... very far away." Discussion focused on defining multicultural education, resolving issues related to the debate between pluralistic (many cultures within one society) and particularistic (independently functioning cultures) views, deciding how and where multiculturalism might be included in the curriculum, and developing pedagogical techniques for implementation of a multicultural curriculum. We began by trying to reach consensus on a definition of multicultural education.

FACING THE ISSUES

The only thing about which many agree is that something is wrong.

What is multiculturalism in an educational sense?

Is it an attitude, a perspective, a set of ideas, a social studies curriculum? Is it a process, a product, or both? How many cultures make up a "multi" view? What cultures should be featured and who should determine these? Should the commonality of humans be the focal point of education or should diversity be stressed? What does multicultural education mean to a small, homogeneous school in rural or upstate New York? What does it mean to a school with a predominantly African-American or Hispanic student population? We had many questions and, at times, felt we had few resources to help find answers.

As we struggled to define multicultural education, our conversations demanded that we talk about values, examine the concept of power, probe our understandings of racism and prejudice, and face the limitations of our own perspectives. Values, power, racism, prejudice, limitations ... very discomfiting topics, very personal topics for discussion with colleagues we did not know. From the notes of one participant, "Today people have come looking for perfect answers; some cloaked in righteousness, some wrapped in anger ... The only thing about which many agree is that something is wrong ..." And from another, "I came into this seminar thinking multiculturalism was a political issue and we would be used ... " and another, "... I'm hearing a bewildering mixture of opinions and sentiment ... united in a common concern for fostering a humane, just society, but disrupted by clashing histories, perceptions, needs and views of the future."

It was the common concern for "fostering a humane, just society" that enabled us to keep our discussions afloat through depth-charged, murky waters. We found that we shared beliefs that:

- Students cannot be multiculturally illiterate if they are to be able to function (work, vote, enjoy life) in today's real world.
- We (schools) can make a difference.
- We must start now and with ourselves.
- We can begin with the culture children bring with them to school.
- We need to help children build a sense of self and the ability to see from others' perspectives.
- We are the models.

Gradually we began to move toward a common understanding and shared vision. Definitions of multicultural education varied from the very philosophical to the simplistic. Debate over language was important in hammering out our definition because only through close examination

of semantics were concepts and misconceptions brought to light. We clarified understandings, wrestled to grasp another's perceptions and stimulated changes in thinking. We finally reached consensus with a simple, straightforward definition followed by several critical attributes:

Multicultural education supports a community of learners as they work in a morally sound environment to develop an appreciation of themselves and each other as worthy individuals, as participants and contributors to their own cultures and as productive world citizens. The critical attributes of such an education are:

- Close partnership with community.
- Goals and activities across the curriculum.
- Detection and decrying of intolerance and injustice.
- Dislodging of notions of superiority based on class, race, gender or religion.
- Supportive administration.
- Valuing and respecting of diverse gifts, attributes and qualities of each individual as a source of cultural richness.

Valuing diversity and celebrating differences require critical attitude change.

Valuing diversity and celebrating differences require critical attitude change, and we felt the philosophy of educational institutions needs to be aggressively reassessed with this attitude in mind. We have to perceive and create a world in which there is room for many "right" ways and possibly conflicting truths. As one participant noted, "We cannot say to ourselves ... those people believe or live such and such; that is okay, but my life is really the right way." The notions of diversity and differences and their impact on how children prepare to live in our global society led us to discuss the balance between what is common to us as human beings — a universal view — and those qualities and characteristics that make us unique — a view of the individual as a reflection of culture.

Tackling the question of pluralism and particularism proved as difficult as defining multicultural education. Viewpoints ranged from "American civilization began with an English base ... a particularist position would be artificial, irrelevant and dividing" to "... advocating allegiance to one's culture." Several participants urged caution in allowing too much segmentation of our society and suggested that care needs to be taken to "sort out clearly the political agenda from the educational agenda." Another wrote, "... one must remember that eventually all students enter the undifferentiated 'real' world ... not just American society, but the larger global community."

It was clear from the debate over the pluralist and particularist viewpoints that open

It was clear from the debate over the pluralist and particularist viewpoints that open dialogue is essential.

dialogue is essential. Strict adherence to either view signaled two dangers to one seminar participant: first, that the essential objective of multicultural education (achievement of a just society) will be lost because the focus will become too biased and distorted; and, second, that a nonconceptual approach could transform multicultural education into another "chapter" or unit of isolated study.

In an effort to avoid this treatment, both those holding pluralist and those holding particularist views recommended the following:

- Creation of national/state agenda with a clear definition of multicultural education and statements of goals and issues.
- Provision of guidelines for infusion of multiculturalism in all subject areas by state education departments.
- Latitude to individual districts to highlight cultures reflecting their community cultures as they meet state mandated goals.
- Delineation of change mandates in curriculum areas and recognition that attitudes and social skills need separate change strategies.

SEEKING THE WAY ...

Many participants cited the Select Seminar process itself as the ideal model for encouraging change in content, attitudes, and perceptions. Even with such a diverse group of educators representing a number of different cultures, we were able to focus with intensity on a difficult, ambiguous topic laden with emotional overtones. Participants began the seminar at various stages of readiness, from the professor with published articles on multiculturalism to the leader of a small, rural school district immersed in its own set of problems far from multicultural in nature and to the social studies teacher attending to find out what this might mean to her curriculum requirement. We listened to each other and groped for the right words to use and appreciated how troubled the principal of an urban school was by her need to balance "whatever it takes to get my kids to succeed ... with teaching them to become active participants in a pluralistic society." Abstract comments and ideas and disconnected attitudes and feelings became concrete and connected to real people as we talked.

The seminar process enabled us to recognize that there we "some societal problems which cannot be overcome by multicultural education" and at the same time, construct an approach that we felt could help schools begin to develop and implement a philosophy of education for a diverse population. The comment that "culture is not something upon a stage; it's part of your being" finally linked the goal of teaching the whole child with the need to incorporate each child's cultural background with his/her schooling. It also gave the group a final nudge into the realization that we really have no choice. We must listen to each other; we must talk to each other. We must develop multiple views and create a workable vision for education or limit ourselves and our children's future. Those who are multiculturally illiterate will be dysfunctional in an analogous way to those who cannot read, write and compute in the real world.

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CREATING A VISION ...

Often simple misinterpretations of language or actions begin a downward spiral for children.

Concerned, compassionate teachers are sometimes blind to the fact that what their own cultures promote as inherent truth may be cultural propaganda.

A newly arrived Asian student refuses to establish and hold eye contact with the school psychologist testing her for primary placement. The psychologist notes in the record that the child has deficient social skills. Large numbers of Hawaiian children have difficulty learning to read in a traditional classroom setting. Warm Springs Native American children actively resist elaborate verbal preparation for a school task and do poorly in group tests. An African American kindergartner hears the question, "Don't you think it's time to begin your writing lesson now?" When he answers no, the teacher, believing he is belligerent, is angry. The child is confused. The teacher asked him a question and he answered it. Why should the teacher be angry?

In these cases, the educators and the students are not connecting.

All children enter school with different experiences, different patterns of language development and different readiness levels for the tasks ahead. Experientially, teachers generally have a good understanding of preschool experiences and can capitalize on those experiences by linking instruction to the information the children bring to school. If, however, they are not from the same cultural background and have had little contact with the different cultural groups represented in their classrooms, the task of helping children connect instruction with real life becomes more difficult.

In the previous examples, the school psychologist needed to know that in some Asian cultures children are taught that looking an adult in the eye during conversation shows disrespect and is not a sign of deficient social skills as was noted on the testing report, a label that may harm the student. The young Hawaiian children began to read more easily when teachers incorporated the "talk story," a major Hawaiian speaking event, into the structure of the lesson.

The teacher on the Warm Springs Reservation observed children spending long periods silently listening and watching the work of the elders. They spontaneously joined in at various stages of the task when they appeared to have decided they were ready. Children tested themselves at various stages in private, coming forth to share their successes. Incorporating these observations into classroom practice created a more comfortable arena for learning for the Warm Springs children.

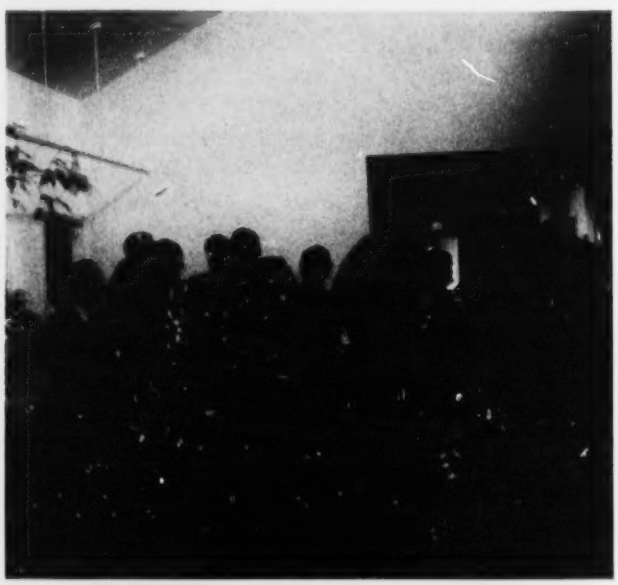
The teacher of the African-American boy was indirectly telling him to do something. This indirect use of language is very much a part of white, middle-class communications patterns. Studies of language

patterns involving African-American parents and their children indicate a more direct language pattern. The boy answered the question asked of him. If the teacher had said, "It's time to begin the lesson," the boy would have understood the directive and known the expected response.

Often simple misinterpretations of language or actions begin a downward spiral for children, particularly minority children — a spiral that accelerates into a spin that may carry them further away from the mainstream of society. Teachers must understand that even those ideas often proclaimed as universal truths are sometimes in reality white Anglo-Saxon precepts. Concerned, compassionate teachers are sometimes blind to the fact that what their own cultures promote as inherent truth may be cultural propaganda. A primary example is the western promotion of individuality. Non-European cultures often support the understanding that the needs of the group prevail over the needs of the individual. Thus for many children, learning activities that stress group and team effort rather than individual competition are more effective.

As seminar participants, we struggled to understand concepts, develop different perspectives, and finally to create a multicultural approach to education. Flashes of insight occurred as we discussed incidents in our classrooms. They were small insights, limited glimpses of another's perspectives, but powerful illustrators of the kinds of immediate changes that educators must make to help all children reach their potential.

We agreed that the first step is to know ourselves better. If we learn to recognize and interpret the biases and directions in our own perspectives, perhaps we will not be so quick to assume that students share our own view of the world and our own preferred ways of communicating. We must examine our teaching styles and understand that everything we do gives students messages as to our opinion of them. The seating plan for the classroom, teacher-student eye contact, frequency of smiles, length of wait time, amount of praise/criticism, frequency and detail of teacher feedback, frequency and nature of interruptions are all indicators of our expectations. If we ask ourselves



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what we are doing right, we might then be able to build upon these activities and processes for even more successes.

We submit that learning to take another's perspective and see the world through others' viewpoints should be a primary education goal from the moment children enter the formal world of schooling. We considered what that might imply for children arriving for a preschool orientation or "screening." For example, it might mean that children spend some time in play activities being observed by the teacher, the nurse, the speech therapist and others rather than a series of specific tasks or tests that challenge some children, perplex some, and immediately defeat others. It might also mean small group discussions with a mix of parents from different cultures talking to teachers and to each other about the things their children like to do, what they do well, how the school can build upon what the children already know, and most importantly, **what educators, parents and children agree** are the expectations for the first year of schooling. Preparations for teachers and other school staff might include workshops and/or collaborations with universities with appropriate multicultural programming.

A CLASSROOM VIEW ...

Discovering, understanding and appreciating diversity should occur naturally within the context of a primary classroom and become an integral part of the children's total education experience. We feel strongly that multicultural education needs to be a normal, "naturally displayed" function of classroom dynamics and curricula. **Implications of this led us to develop images of classrooms where:**

- The stories read and told are often personal and reflect many different perspectives.
- The games played, songs sung, art forms explored represent a variety of cultures.
- Community values are respected and incorporated into class activities.
- Parental input is sought and valued, resulting in an ongoing communication network.
- Activities are structured in both individual and interactive modes.
- Children role play, taking the views of others.
- Library centered learning is an integral part of curriculum. (Library centered learning encourages students to explore several perspectives and to weigh their opinions based upon research. It offers students practice in a valuable, decision making process.)

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... but the underlying philosophy of respect for difference must remain a vivid, articulated commitment.

- Different ways of doing tasks are discussed; options and choices abound.
- Multi-sensory processes for recall are practiced.
- A variety of student evaluation methods are utilized including:
  - — Creative arts. (writing, visual arts, drama)
  - — Review and reflection.
  - — Portfolio evaluation. (It allows the student to showcase an entire repertoire of work, thus basing judgment upon the work of an extended period rather than that of a single examination period. It can also take into account the student's oral presentation and/or defense of the student's study.)
- Learning activities always include closure in which students reflect, write about and discuss content and learning process, thus helping them become aware of their own thought processes and learning strategies (thinking about thinking).

The above elements of a multicultural classroom are appropriate for every grade level from primary to secondary. The degree of sophistication and complexity may change, but the underlying philosophy of respect for difference must remain a vivid, articulated commitment. Only when the organizational structure of every classroom as well as that of the overall school and school system reflects an educational philosophy that celebrates diversity as a root of the creative human spirit will we realize multicultural education.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE ...

The challenge of such a philosophical commitment is direct and consuming for all within the community. All perspective groups — students, teachers, administrators, school support personnel, parents, and other community members — have their own set of responsibilities.

+ **Teachers**

Our visions of multicultural classrooms must then include teachers who:

- Serve as skilled "guides" as students explore their understandings of the world as they and others see it.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the diverse cultures that make up our nation and the world (not just those represented in the classroom).
- Understand that verbal and non-verbal communication patterns of different cultures may vary and are aware of the effects of differing patterns on adult/child and peer interactions.
- Encourage interaction between different gender, age, culture, and ability groups and undergo training in group processing.

- Consistently model understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of difference (cultural and otherwise) in the classroom, school, and community.
- Continually review courses, subjects, and materials, disallowing bias and prejudice.
- Insure inclusion of material of a global nature.
- View themselves as co-learners, facilitators, not dispensers of knowledge.

Teachers may work diligently to accomplish all of the above, but even that is not enough.

+ Administrators and Board of Education Members

Our vision of a multicultural education includes administrators and a board of education who:

- Model a strong multicultural perspective, taking special care to maintain in their relationships with their staff members the attitude of respect and cooperative processes that they expect to see in the roles of their teachers and other staff members.
- Fund and encourage other-culture immersion experiences for students and staff within the school district.
- Insure that every member of their staff is well informed as to the needs and priorities of the particular school population.
- Emphasize group interactions.
- Meet on a regular basis with small groups of staff members to listen, discuss, and later implement shared decisions and/or suggestions.
- Encourage staff members and students to take risks, allow the freedom of failure, and emphasize growth from failure.
- Seek and encourage diverse school districts to come together for meaningful, large scale, long term sharing of learning experiences.

- Become co-learners with students on a regular basis throughout the school year, taking advantage of various multicultural learning opportunities offered by the school district.

+ Support Staff

A school system is not merely students, teachers and administrators. **The very nature of a multicultural education philosophy demands that all members of the school support staff:**

- Are treated as integral, critical components of the educational process.
- Attend a minimum of two staff development days per year that focus upon the particular needs and priorities of the students within the school district and upon communication strategies that foster respect and acceptance of others.
- Make a conscious and deliberate attempt to treat all students with respect and high expectations.
- Take advantage of opportunities to share interests and multicultural learning opportunities with students.

+ Parents

Since multicultural education addresses the whole child, *the role of parents in such education is indeed a critical one.* **Therefore the parents in our multicultural vision are those who:**

- Are treated as an integral, critical component of the educational process, and as such, talk regularly with school staff and students about educational and community issues.
- Are knowledgeable as to the definition of and necessity for multicultural education.
- Model a respect for difference.
- Take an active role in the education activities in their children's schools, including at times becoming a co-learner.
- Understand and utilize parental support strategies for multicultural education such as
  - — Guiding their children's problem solving process by offering choices that become more complex as their children grow.
  - — Seeking other-culture experience for themselves and their children.
  - — Listening to their children and encouraging discussion and debate within the family.

+ Community Members

Building schools that help children gain respect for differences is only one part of this educational equation. Our children live and learn within a greater community. **Therefore our vision sees community members who:**

- Are treated as an integral, critical component of the educational process.
- Are knowledgeable and supportive of the education mission of the school district.
- Take active roles in education activities whether this be by serving on committees, working as a volunteer, or **at various times sharing in the learning processes.**

A SENSE OF IMMEDIACY

...an honestly multicultural education is simply good education.

Creating the above vision was surprisingly easy. Our doubts, disagreements, discouraging dialogues melted away when we began to discuss the elements of a truly multicultural education. Here we found ourselves in agreement, because, **in reality, an honestly multicultural education is simple good education.** Knowing what we should be is the easy part. Finding how to get there is much more difficult. But we can and we must make a beginning. We need to know who we are. We need to develop a perception of ourselves in relation to a multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial society. Newly infused content and pedagogical techniques will be ineffective if we ourselves do not have a firm belief in the ultimate importance of enabling and encouraging people to take another's perspective and respect another's cultural heritage and expression. Clearly, one day workshops, education department reports and mandates will not change attitudes and group dynamics. Only careful, informed reflection, thoughtful dialogue, active goal setting, the freedom to take risks and *the time* in which to do all of these will encourage the change process.

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Each school system, as a microcosm of the citizens of its community, needs to determine a multicultural vision for itself, adopt a value structure to guide all members of the school community, and ensure that the vision includes the perspectives of representative cultures. Educators should lead representatives from all segments of the community as they define the requirements of a "just" community. Training for all school staff in development of such a community is the next step. This means teacher training and inservice courses in diverse teaching/learning styles, monitoring curricula, world cultures and self-evaluation. Seminars in communication strategies and group dynamics are critical training components for the entire school district staff. Such an integrated, holistic approach is perhaps overwhelming in its all encompassing nature, but we believe the very survival of our children may well depend on our facing these issues.

"The ability to survive in the 21st century ... is the ability to function at a high intellectual level. Encyclopedic knowledge as a prime insight is passe." (Gordon,

1991) We must be able to pose questions and develop multiple strategies for solving problems; *the answers to a successful future are not how much you know, but how much you know what to do.* This implies the importance, from the very beginning of the education process, of our leading children through a learning process that enables them to see multiple perspectives, and further, to understand these perspectives. We must change the way we teach to include immersion in topics and to include intensive, interactive classrooms.

Sometimes during the seminar we were overwhelmed, feeling the crushing enormity of the task. The obstacle of stubborn traditions, entrenched beliefs and practices and the incredible training efforts to create change seemed insurmountable. At times we shared a feeling of powerlessness. We were encouraged, however, by one participant's quote of Antigone from Sophocles's ancient play. "A person ought to do what a person can do." As educators, we agreed that it is our moral and ethical responsibility to do what we can do and to let our attempts begin with this document.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO TEACHERS:

Fall 1991

American children have always grown up to live their lives in a racially and culturally diverse nation, and American education has always tried to prepare them to live in such a society. This preparation has emphasized the commonalities among all peoples. Teaching children to identify and understand those characteristics that make us all human is critical to the survival of our democratic process. Yet the very fact that we are a multicultural country facing the global problems of the twenty-first century behooves us to teach respect and understanding not only of similarities, but also of differences.

People need a multicultural perspective to be able to function (work, vote, enjoy life) in today's real world. You need only walk through your nearest grocery store or shopping mall to realize how globally dependent is our entire economic system. Those who are multiculturally illiterate will be dysfunctional in the coming century in the same manner as those who cannot read or write are today. Multicultural literacy will not come merely from the study of other culture. It is an understanding of difference that crosses all disciplines and subject areas. Multicultural education can and should be an exciting, interactive process that promotes good thinking and problem solving skills.

Begin by evaluating yourself, your upbringing, your education, your style of learning and your style of teaching. What are your assets/limitations? What are your other-culture experiences and understandings? How do they affect your role in the education process? How can you learn more about the cultures of the students in your school community?

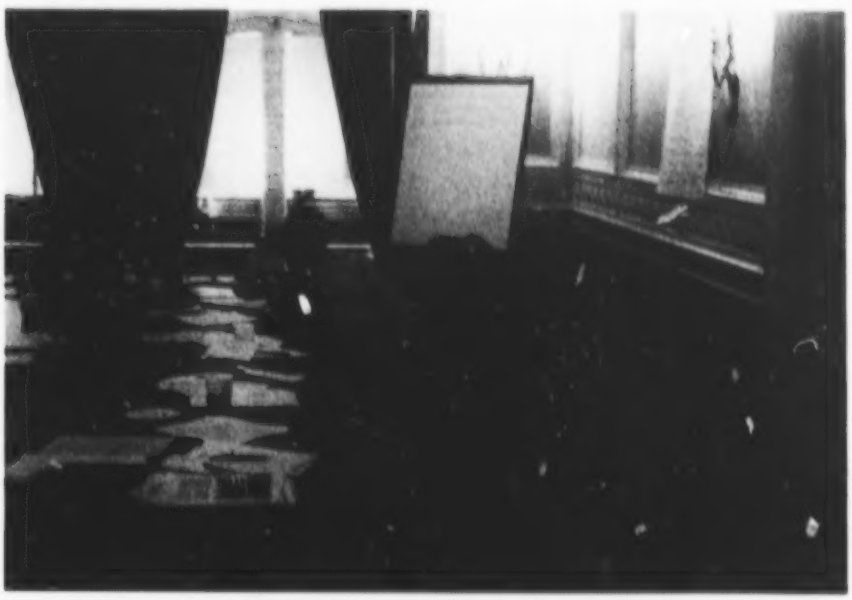
In every lesson, in every activity related to the education process, seek opportunities to study, to perceive, to understand from a variety of perspectives. Be flexible in your teaching style. Investigate the strategies of cooperative learning and alternative evaluation. Find ways to make these educational tools work for you. In history class, foster knowledgeable debate. Assign students to the roles of historical figures. Encourage careful research of the individual and the time period. Then set up a debate situation to examine the historical trends or incidents from the point of view of the various figures. In literature class, be sure you provide a wide range of writing assignments. Perhaps create your own classroom library of texts that represents the cultural heritages present in your classroom and that introduces several unfamiliar ones. In math class, help students notice and respect the different ways of solving a certain problem. *It is critical that students become aware of how they think and that they understand there are often several ways to approach one problem.* Be careful not to impose your way of solving every problem upon your students. Take the time to see from a totally different perspective.

Be an active listener. Listen to and respect those around you, especially your students. Listen to their writing as well as their speaking. Writing is thinking and you can encourage good thinking processes by asking students to write their opinions. Think carefully and creatively about the writing assignments you give so that they allow students

to include their own values and ideas. Help them learn to support their thoughts. Have them write often and write back to them.

No matter how homogeneous your school and/or district may be, you have a wonderful resource for multicultural experience right beside you. Interage learning activities should be part of every grade level. Whether the partners in learning differ by only one year, or whether 80 years separate them; interage learning brings greater awareness and understanding of the perspective of others. There are a variety of exciting models of interage learning, from a "buddy system" in elementary school to classes that include elementary, middle and high school students and community members who come together once or twice a week to study a subject of special interest. Investigate the possibilities and find one that is right for you and your school.

Keep alert to the significance of multicultural education. Continually seek opportunities for other-cultural experiences for yourself and your students. Continually monitor texts and other curriculum materials for bias. **Model** respect for every individual and speak out against racial, ethnic or any other incident that smells of prejudice or injustice. Above all, remember that multicultural education is not some new educational jargon or trend. It is, in the truest sense, good education, a process that is interactive, tumultuous and exciting!



AN OPEN LETTER TO PARENTS:

Fall 1991

America has always been a land in which peoples from different lands and histories continually strive to live together in harmony. Our American culture — our music, art, literature, language, food, clothing, sports, holidays, and customs — all show a richness made possible by contributions of many diverse cultures. As parents and teachers leading our children into a century facing critical, global problems, we must help our children gain new understanding of diversity.

Look around your home. How many products — cars, televisions, stereos, appliances, clothing articles, or food products — are a part of the global economy? Americans are at this moment connected by thousands of threads to those outside the United States of America. In the 21st century, these connections will increase many times over. Our children must become multiculturally literate if they are to function (work, vote, enjoy life) in today's real world. They must be able to understand the world in which they live. Those who are multiculturally illiterate will be dysfunctional in the 21st century in the same manner that those who cannot read or write are today. Multicultural literacy will not come from studies in social studies classes. It must involve a partnership of home and school. Your help is an essential component of this vital aspect of your children's education.

You can begin your part by evaluating your own heritage. What are the good things about being a member of your family? What are the difficult things? Talk to your children honestly about their heritage. Explain the good and the difficult events/time periods in your family history. What traditions and beliefs are important to your family? Exhibit pride in your heritage. Continue and perhaps establish new family traditions. (For example — our family always has a cook-out picnic on the Fourth of July.)

What are your other-culture experiences and understandings? Discuss these with your children. Seek experiences for your family in which you all will become familiar with people different from yourselves. As a family, visit museums, festivals, senior citizen centers, and homes for the disabled. Watch television programs and/or films together. Read with and to your children. THEN discuss what you have read or seen. Take turns putting yourselves in the place of others — real or fictional. If you were the giant, how would you feel about Jack?

Listen to your children. Respond to their opinions with sincere comments. Whether you are in agreement or disagreement, give your children's opinions respect. Take them seriously.

Model behavior that supports a multicultural perspective. Do not participate in racial or ethnic "jokes or slurs." Do not allow anyone in the family to "put down" another. Come to school and talk with us, the educators who are involved in your children's education. Help us to understand and communicate with your children. Share with us the responsibility for educating children who will become productive problem solvers of the 21st century.

AFTERWORD

The 1991 Select Seminar Report on Excellence in Education is a summary of the conversations, discussions, and conclusions of a group of significant people who seriously considered a highly emotional and controversial topic: multiculturalism in education.

The report should be read as a summary of those five days of conversations and not necessarily as a document developed by all twenty-seven participants. In fact, some seminar participants suggested alternate phrasing of certain points or elimination of some statements. The final report in its entirety, however, was endorsed by the members of the seminar.

We thank Mr. Charles Touhey, Touhey Associates in Albany, who drove to Rensselaerville Institute on Monday, March 18, to share his ideas on multiculturalism in the schools with us. Mr. Touhey also joined one of the select seminar groups at the Rockefeller Institute during one of its three days there.

Dee Warner and Jean Rose, two seminar participants, synthesized the volumes of writing, the discussions, conversations, and recommendations into the final report. We thank them for their sensitive, perceptive, and clear report.